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# *Private devotion in England on the eve of the Reformation illustrated from works printed or reprinted in the period 1530-40*

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The Four Last Things.

In the most often quoted biblical source, "In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua",<sup>563</sup> the last things are not further defined. By the later fifteenth century the Last Things were generally understood to be four in number: death, judgement, heaven and hell. They form a natural group spanning the gulf between the conclusion of this temporal life and the decision made at God's judgement which determines the soul's eternal fate. It was probably the popularity of works such as the Cordiale in the latter half of the fifteenth century which helped to establish the four as the standard content of the Last Things; until then, and frequently thereafter, the connection between them seems to have been casual and far from settled.<sup>564</sup> This organisation of content may have been due, as Tenetti suggests,<sup>565</sup> to clerical pressure and the desire to present a coherent body of teaching and devotion based on the growing contemporary awareness of death, and to widen the restricted scope of the traditional ars moriendi:

La posizione di precedenza che la morte ha nella enumerazione dei novissimi e ancora di più la sua priorità cronologica ha certamente facilitato il compito degli autori di questi trattati di rinsaldare il senso cristiano dell'aldilà. 566

However, in England, apart from the Cordiale the four last things were not generally discussed as a distinctive self-contained group. More often they would be discussed along with other topics, in the course of a general treatise, or else they were discussed separately, so that the literature on death or legends concerning the pains of hell stood as independent works. All four topics are discussed in the course of the Medytacyons of saynt Bernarde, The myrroure of golde for

the synfull soule and Hughe's Troubled mans medicine, but none of these works confines itself to those four subjects; the two former treatises discuss in general terms what man is and what his destiny should be, and are closely related to the contemptus mundi genre, while Hughe's work conveys much general instruction and may be seen as an extension of the ars moriendi book. As the preceding discussion of the business of dying has shown, consideration of death raised not only the question of the judgement which was to follow death, but the life which went before was of importance too. Heaven and hell were more often discussed as a pair of opposites than separately, and purgatory was rarely ignored altogether.<sup>567</sup> The four last things could only be separated from wider and related issues in a rather arbitrary way, for catechetical purposes, or to provide a treatise or sermon with a useful structure. But although they are not often discussed as a group in the devout treatises of the 1530's, death, judgement, heaven and hell were all considered important subjects by Protestant authors as well as in traditional Catholic treatises.

#### Death.

That there was a distinction between natural or physical death and the more significant spiritual death or death of the soul seems to have been widely accepted, and some such division is implied in the very notion of a good death.<sup>568</sup> For the most part little attention was given to physical death and devotional writers concentrated on the state of the soul at death. In his Preparation to deathe Erasmus introduces four categories of death: natural, spiritual, transformatory and eternal. Natural death is described in the usual terms of the severance of soul and body, while spiritual death is the separation of



the mind from God, by which he seems to mean some form of rebellion against or denial of God. When natural and spiritual death coincide then eternal death, "the deathe of hel", occurs, because there is no chance of repentance left after this life is ended.<sup>569</sup> Erasmus dwells most upon the transformatory death, the casting off of the old Adam and taking up the "ymage of the newe Adam whiche is ~~the~~ Chryste our lorde", the triumph of the spirit over the flesh: "This death is mother of the spirituall life, likewyse as syn is father of the spiritual death, and also of the death infernall".<sup>570</sup>

Apart from Lupset's treatise, the signs of death and medieval hand-books such as the Boke of knowledge were as near as most authors came to considering physical death. The ars moriendi books by concentrating upon the preparation of man's soul for the life hereafter tended to overlook death itself, and at most provided a few prayers to be said after the soul's departure. However, one group of treatises conveys a rather more vivid picture of death, in the form of complaints or laments of those who find themselves under sentence of death. Three treatises of this nature were printed during the 1530's: The complaynt of the soule<sup>571</sup> and The dyenge creature,<sup>572</sup> both printed by de Worde, and Bishop Fisher's A spirituall consolacyon.<sup>573</sup> The complaynt and the Spirituall consolacyon are both laments made by the dying man,<sup>574</sup> while The dyenge creature takes the form of a series of complaints<sup>575</sup> made by the creature to his good angel, to reason, dread and conscience, to his five wits, and to faith, hope and charity, and their replies to him; it also includes a complaint of the soul to the body and the body's lament, and the work ends with the creature's supplication to the Blessed Virgin and her intercession on his behalf to Jesus. It is the complaint of the

soul to the body and "The lamentable lamentacyon of the dyenge body to the soule" which give the most obvious clue as to the type of literature in which such complaints originated, the Debate between the Body and the Soul.<sup>576</sup>

The laments share with the ubi sunt and quid profuit motifs a retrospective view-point; the soul looks back over its past life and laments its barrenness, its selfishness, and heedlessness of the death and judgement which now confront it. Having been summoned by death<sup>577</sup> none of the laments makes it quite clear at what stage in relation to death the lament is spoken; in The dyenge creature it seems to draw nearer as the work progresses - the soul finds that there is no time left for amendment of life and <sup>it</sup> must seek salvation by other means. The use of the first person, which is not common in devotional treatises about death, makes the effect of the lament the ~~more~~ urgent and dramatic: this is what it is like to face death unprepared, this is the panic and despair you will feel unless you prepare in advance for death - the warning to be prepared for death was of course common place in sermons, ars moriendi books and other devout treatises. In each case the subject of the lament finds himself unprepared<sup>578</sup> and each soul has plenty with which to reproach himself as he passes in review (it sometimes sounds more like holding an inquest) his past life. The fear, despair and anguish they express exemplifies that remorse of conscience which Erasmus believed accompanied sinners to hell and formed not the least part of their torments there.<sup>579</sup>

The complaynt of the soule opens with what is, in effect, a variation upon the familiar threefold recollection of what I was, what I am, and what I shall be; and the soul because of his past life, his present

hopelessness and consequent fear of the future can see nothing but "sorowe/myserye <sup>&</sup> synne". He feels himself vile and stinking before God, less on account of any bodily corruption as in the vile body genre than because of his sinfulness. He has been unkind and ungrateful to the Lord, who "suffred the moost bytterst deathe for me", he has denied his Creator, and is a dry and unfruitful tree.<sup>580</sup> He has abused the time God has given him<sup>581</sup> and his God-given faculties, his five wits, his life and above all his reason, which should distinguish him from the beasts:

My reason is gyuen to me for to knowe my lorde god/  
and for to knowe howe I sholde lyue to the pleasure  
of hym/and to thynke vpon the lyfe that is to come/  
and holyly for to ordre myselfe therto/and for to  
auoyde the greate tourmentes and the endlesse trybulacyon  
the whiche after this lyfe is ordeyned for synne. 582

So he returns to lament his wretched inclination, which is always to earthward and which is drawing him towards damnation, and to sue for mercy to God.

The quotation "tedat animam meam vite mee", with which the work opens, introduces the second and subsequent sections and acts as a refrain to the whole.<sup>583</sup> In the second section the soul laments a comprehensive list of shortcomings from negligence to evil thoughts, from "vnprouffitable heuynesse" and "vnlawfull sadnesse" to "vayne Ioyes" and "myserable pleasures". Life, "a rennynge to dethe," has now brought him close to death, and he is ashamed of his sinful life and afraid to die, unready to face the judgement of God and the possibility of eternal damnation or at least of great pain in purgatory. He laments that he has not feared God, which would have checked his inclination to sin:

A good lorde what shall I do for I want fayth of the/  
 fere of the/loue of the/<sup>2</sup>and drede of the...what shall  
 I do than but turne me to the <sup>2</sup>and aske mercy/for that  
 I have spende my lyfe so miserably. 584

This is the first decisive move of the sinner towards God, to ask mercy and acknowledge his shortcomings. He recognizes that sin must needs have sorrow; "and al my lyfe sholde be wepyng. & ~~and~~ who shall gyue teres y<sup>h</sup>oughe to myne eyen yt I may wepe ynough for my miserable lyuyng". In tears, whose virtues are often sought and praised in devout treatises, lies the answer to the soul's plea-for "moysture" of contrition and grace—of the first section.<sup>585</sup> The lament grows into a prayer for compunction, whose opening is reminiscent of the seventh of the Fifteen Oes.<sup>586</sup> But soon the soul is again lamenting its dullness and its predilection for evil. Unless the soul abandons its sinful ways it will be destined to spiritual or eternal death, and the familiar exhortation to suffer short temporal pain in this life so as to win eternal joy is reiterated. Also, if it is tempted to think sin is unimportant, the soul is reminded how God has punished many, even angels, who sinned, and cast them out of heaven. To sin is to repay the lover Christ by making Him suffer death again; it dishonours Him, and such ingratitude will arouse the wrath of the Judge. Death will come sooner than it is looked for, and the soul will be called upon to account for every word and action:

O wretche lerne to wepe aptly and to take wylfull sorowe/  
 a greate cause hast yu to wepe <sup>2</sup>and sorowe/for yf yu might  
 wepe as moche water as is in the see/yet it were not of  
 thyselfe suffycient to wasshe thy soule from synne... 587

The third section again opens with the quotation from Job, and la<sup>n</sup>ches into another lament for the soul's yearning after evil and its refusal of its Lord and Lover. Not even the threat of eternal torment or recollection of sins committed can break "this greate hardenesse of

myne herte". The soul is alone responsible for its "wretched dysposycyon" to sin;<sup>588</sup> the choice to do good or evil was free. The section ends much as the first one, in a lament for the soul's dryness and the reminder that "I am but as a bayly and a mynystre vnder god and taken charge well to spende his goodes".

The final section is introduced by the same quotation and a request for tears to wash away his accumulated sins. The soul is scorned—"O yu blynde asse"—for its inability to discern the truth or to see the difference between life and death, virtue and vices, felicity and misery. Again the theme of ingratitude is raised. God seeks to overcome unkindness by still more kindness, by good thoughts: "And outwarde he calleth me by p<sup>h</sup>redyngge/and by moche good counseylynge by redyngge/by example gyuyngge..."<sup>589</sup> As long as a person lives God will be merciful, but at the Judgement He will be hard and rigorous. In the face of the imminent threat of God's wrath the sinner condemns his own lack of fear and his failure to realize that this life is uncertain and that he is not immortal, a common delusion of men to judge by the numerous warnings given in devotional treatises. In imagination the unrepentant soul is taken to judgement, where Christ, who has loved him <sup>most</sup> and done for him, will be his accuser:

where he shall laye his woundes agaynst me/  
his crosse/his spere/his crowne of thorne shall  
testyfy agaynst me", 590

together with his good angel. He finds himself in the same position as the Dying Creature—a frightening reversal of the ars moriendi books, where Christ crucified holds out the hope of mercy to the dying man. Not only the devil's, but all the creatures of God for which he has held any responsibility, will join in his condemnation:



The Judge shall be above vs whose handes we shall  
 not escape/the helle vnder vs and the fendes redy  
 to drawe vs thyder/the Judge angred without forth/  
 the consyence bytynged~~and~~ tourmentyng within forth/  
 and sythen the ryght wyse man scarsely shal be saued/  
 the wretched synner so vmbelapped wt wretchednes where  
 shall he become whome feere of dampnacyon||and remorse  
 of consyence shall shake/and make hym to cry for woo. 591

Yet, although the soul is threatened by the terrible prospect of judgement, the work does not end on a pessimistic note any more than do the ars moriendi books. From the helpless and despairing toils of sin the sinner is encouraged to look upon his Saviour Christ, whose merits are sufficient to redeem the most grievous sins. He is to look up, to trust Christ and not despair. The work ends with a prayer for mercy, "Now Jesu/Jesu have mercy vpon me..." and with the hope of admittance to "the nombre of thyne electe chyldren", where the name of Jesus will ever be praised.

In a work of this nature the medieval love of repetition and lack of logically ordered arguments are positive assets: repetition helps to intensify the emotional power of the sinner's laments, and the absence of a developing argument enables the author to suggest a vacillation between despair and cautious hope which is entirely appropriate to the soul's state. The monologue conveys well the struggle of a soul seeking to rise but made helpless by its proclivity to sin. The ebb and flow of the work, where hope of mercy is repeatedly swallowed up in despairing lament only to rise again, seems much closer to the experience of most Christians than the sudden conversion or turning point, followed by an irreproachably reformed life, or a steady progress towards virtue untroubled by doubts, temptations or relapses—the two ways implied by most saints' lives and by many treatises on the life of perfection. The

personal feelings which find expression in the monologue help to make the work more effectively moving, more akin to some passages from the drama or from lyric pieces, than many traditional devout treatises, whose rather impersonal style gives little scope for the <sup>expression of</sup> personal feeling apart from devotion to Jesus. The work manages to make both the near-despair of the sinner and the awful threat of judgement real enough to be taken seriously, and yet the hope of Christ's mercy is never entirely lost: the Complaynt of the soule is an effective warning against unprepared death rather than a negative condemnation of a sinner's death.

Fisher's A spirituall consolacyon is far more overtly didactic than the Complaynt of the soule. Addressed to his sister, Elizabeth, the exercise is recommended to stir the reader to a devout and virtuous life. The three conditions of undertaking this exercise are that the reader should imagine herself confronted by death; that she should read it alone, when she may concentrate upon it without distractions; and that she preface its reading with a prayer, that it "may fruitfully worke in your soule a good and vertuous life". It is designed to serve as a meditatio mortis, not unlike Whitford's Dayly exercyse, but because it is so intent upon making the message clear it is less dramatic and perhaps less immediately effective as a warning against unprepared death.

The work opens with a lament for death's sudden assault, and a comparison between the death the sinner might have died had she been prepared and the death to which ~~her~~ unpreparedness ~~has~~ condemned ~~her~~. Death cannot be put off to allow time for repentance, neither by bribery, riches nor by "as many teares as there be in the seas droppes of water". <sup>592</sup> There is a long section where the soul details the ways in which it has misused

time, prefaced by a warning to the reader to use his time well and so to avoid his plight. He goes on to express hatred of the earth, his body and the world, whose appetites he has followed: Fisher makes sustained use of the "vile body" motif to express his hatred, including in it a version of the signs of old age and death.<sup>593</sup> By not looking below the surface appearance of things the sinner has so lived as to condemn himself to hell, or at least to purgatory. Repentance in time may save a soul, but the repentance of a damned soul is simply one more torment to him, remorse of conscience. For the second time the soul expresses the hope that "by the example of me all other might beware" and avoid his fate.<sup>594</sup> A conventional quid profuit passage leads to yet another "vile body" condemnation of the body, whose misdeeds will have to be answered for "before the throne of the Judge most terrible". The soul is now faced with the dilemma of Everyman and the Dying Creature, to find witnesses who will support him at the judgement. The few good deeds he has are invalidated, because they were done from impure motives, not for the love of God; and he cannot trust to the prayers of his friends<sup>595</sup> nor to the intercession of his particular saints, since his devotion to them was but slight. His only chance, like that of the soul in the Complaynt of the soule, lies in God's mercy; but Fisher does not pause to elaborate, and immediately passes on to underline the need to prepare for death in good time and the folly of not so doing, so the note of hope with which the Complaynt concludes is not sufficiently emphasized to lighten the Spirituell consolacyon. Fisher has, in fact, chosen to cast a sermon in the form of a lament; but in his desire to instruct and warn the reader he has not allowed the soul to speak for itself, and so despite many effective and moving passages he has undercut



one of the lament's strongest points, the personal expression of grief and despair which arises out of a particular situation. The "consolacyon for troubled consciences" in the fourth chapter of the second table declares:

The examples of theym that do euyllye and are dampned/or saynt Gregory doth shewe in a dialoge/do profyt vs to be a monysshement/and an instructyon that they may be happye whome other mennes perylles do make wise... These holsome instructyons/the examples of wretched persones do profitably confirme in vs/whiche them chyefly be of power and efficacyte/yf we put on vs the mynde of theym whiche suffer theym/and conuict oure selfe in theyre stede and place...596

It is a useful summary of what Fisher seems to have intended in his Spirituell consolacyon.

It could be argued that the Complaynt of the soule generates the greatest intensity of emotion of the three works under discussion, but the most dramatic piece, even apart from its use of dialogue, is The dyenge creature. It has several points of contact with the morality play Everyman: for instance, the treatise's dramatic opening and description of Death's summons could almost be a prose summary of the opening of Everyman:

Alas that ever I synned in my lyfe/to me is come this day the dredefull tydynges that ever I herde/here hath ben with me a sergeaunt of armes whose name is crewelte frome the kynge of all kynges/lorde of all lordes/~~and~~ Iuge<sup>8</sup> of all Iuges/ lyenge on me his mace of his offyce sayenge vnto me I arest you <sup>8</sup>and warne you to make you redy ~~and~~ yt ye fayle not to be redy every houre whan ye be called on/ye shall not wete whan. 597

The same messenger advises the creature to think back over his life and to see how God has from the beginning provided for him. There <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ his

three "borowes" or sponsors at baptism and his good angel; when he was older he received three "sad counseyllers", reason, dread and conscience, and also five wits to govern, and now he must give account of his stewardship before the righteous and incorruptible Judge. So, in turn, the creature seeks the help of these guides only to be told by one after the other that although sympathetic and willing to help they cannot, because the creature has in life neither heeded their advice nor ruled them properly. The successive failure of each potential source of help, from kindred, neighbours and friends, his good angel<sup>598</sup> and finally his five wits, leaves the creature, like Everyman, ever more exposed.

Having failed to find any comfort in his ~~own~~ powers the creature turns to complain to Faith and Hope, asserting "I have alway byleued as ye chyrche of crysten<sup>dome</sup> hath taught me".<sup>599</sup> He goes on to detail some of those beliefs, particularly regarding the mystery of the Incarnation and the Blessed Virgin's part in it. He then asks Faith and Hope to be "my a vocates in the hyghe courte",<sup>600</sup> and to "be a meane to me" to the Blessed Virgin, who is described in her role as mother of mercy and friend of sinners:

She is quene of heuen/lady of the worlde/  
and empresse of hell/and saynge to her sone  
cryst Jesu hath dyed ~~and~~ suffred so tourmentous  
a deth/and in her owne syght to her grete sorowe  
~~and~~ moderly compassyon/I hope she wolde be lothe eke  
yt the precyous passyon sholde be loste in ony  
creature yt her blyssed sone suffred so pacyently, 601

Faith and Hope, how<sup>e</sup>ver, advise recourse to Charity as well, of whom the creature asks forgiveness and promises to forgive all who have in any<sup>way</sup> hurt him.

At this point the creature's efforts to gather advocates are interrupted by the complaint of the soul to the creature. The first part of the complaint is occupied by an indictment of the world and an exposure of hypocritical worldly friends, whose only concern is to get their hands upon the creature's coffers as soon as possible. For a moment the creature is forced to look outside himself and to consider the fate of his possessions. However, the soul gives an unusual twist to the conventional warning not to trust earthly friends too far, for he turns it into a condemnation of the creature's treatment of his closest friend, his soul, and this provides the transition into the traditional lament of the soul, as to why it had to be coupled to one who would use it so ill and for whose misdeeds it would be forced to suffer. To this charge the body can only plead guilty and like the soul place its hope in Mary.

On their return, now eagerly awaited, Faith, Hope and Charity report that the "pryncesse" is willing to plead the creature's cause and Faith and Hope agree to stand by him. He is advised to arm himself with "a sure and hole confession", with contrition and the will to do satisfaction. Having attempted to comfort the soul by retelling the progress of his case so far, the creature then puts his case before Mary. He begins: "Mekely besecheth and sorowfully complayneth your dredefull supplyaunt", in language reminiscent of the law court. His case is mainly a recapitulation of his sinful life and his attempts to find someone willing to speak for him. A few details are added, such as the information that his infirmity is now beyond the power of "erthly medicyne" to cure, but the second half of the supplication is mainly an appeal to Our Lady's mercy, which concludes: "now in this grete trybulacion<sup>Couer</sup>".

my synfull soule with the mantyll of your mercyes and set your sones precious passion betwene me ~~and~~<sup>&</sup> eternall dampnacyon". The remainder of the work is taken up by Our Lady's supplication to Christ on behalf of the dying creature. She emphasizes the creature's sorrow and contrition, his fear of judgement and his abiding trust in Christ's eventual pardon, and she describes his incessant appeals and lamentations to her and his constant reference to her God-given role of mediator between God and man: "soo all synners that be not in estate of grace sholde be reconsyled and restored to grace by me ~~and~~ be made partyners of your Ioye by me".<sup>602</sup> Mary uses the figure of Aaron's rod to prove her point. The rod signifies Mary, the flower Christ. The rod or stalk is a straight line to the flower, so whoever wishes to reach the flower either ascends by the rod, or bows the rod, causing the flower to stoop. Whoever wishes to rise from sin must do so by Mary; she must be bowed by prayer so that the flower Christ will stoop to hear the sinner's prayers and lighten him with His grace. The illustration suggests that the author regarded Mary's role as mediator as of great importance.

It is Mary's duty to plead the sinner's cause, and she argues that since she shares with the sinner the same father, God, and mother, the Church, she is unwilling to see her brother, the sinner, tormented in prison while she is in bliss. Her second argument is that, as Christ took flesh and blood of Mary and offered them in sacrifice for the redemption of the world, she would not see that redemption miscarry. Thirdly she adduces various passages of Scripture to show the joy in heaven over the reconciliation of a sinner; and fourthly she pleads the

sinner's contrition and remorse, his will to amend and to accept penance, as evidence that he will become a true creature of God. The creature has persuaded her to offer her merits for his and to set her tears<sup>603</sup> in place of his contrition and penance, and added to this there is the work of Charity and the creature's unwavering faith and hope of mercy. Mary's supplication concludes that the creature cannot be left unforgiven, and the Mother of God is not accustomed to have her petitions refused. The work ends on such a note of confidence that the verdict is already known although not formally declared.

The dyenge creature does not discuss how to make a good death, how to prepare for death or how to wrest salvation from the jaws of death; rather it offers a dramatic enactment of the process of salvation. The subject matter, the type of dialogue<sup>604</sup> and the use made of various personified abstractions, such as Reason, Dread, Conscience, Five Wits, Faith, Hope and Charity, bring the piece very close to morality plays such as The Pride of Life and Everyman. Despite its inclusion of a traditional reproach of the soul to the body, its scope is wider than many Body and Soul Debates, ranging from the time of man's birth and his youth to his death and judgement. Like Everyman the creature is active in his pursuit of salvation, and there is far more sense of action and development than in the rather static Complaynt of the soule; also the diversity of characters provides more interest than the sustained monologue of the Complaynt. The dyenge creature might almost be described as a scaled-down morality play; there is certainly a close connection between it and the drama, and its diversity of characters, liveliness and sense of plot are not common characteristics of the devout treatise.



Since The dyenge creature gives unusual prominence to the role of the Blessed Virgin in assisting the soul at death and pleading for it before God, this seems a suitable point at which to consider, briefly, references and prayers to her found in other treatises. The doctrynnall of dethe had recommended<sup>605</sup> that "an ymage of our lady... eyther in pycture or in carued werke" be set before the sick man, and the eyes of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick's effigy are indeed directed towards an image of the Blessed Virgin as Queen of Heaven in the vault above him. Her presence was a comfort and offered hope to the dying. Some form of prayer to Mary is suggested in most of the ars moriendi books;<sup>in</sup> Gerson's La Médecine de L'âme;<sup>606</sup> A lytyll treatyse ... called ars moriendi, which recommends: "Maria plena gracie mater misericordie. tu nos abhoste protege. et in hora mortis suscipe",<sup>607</sup> The doctrynnall of dethe gives a longer one: "O Quene of heven and moder of mercy", also translated in an Horae of 1514, which asks her to purchase by her merits and prayers "forgyuenes and fredome from the doute of synne"; and a little later she is petitioned in a manner reminiscent of the Dying Creature: "I beseche the moost pyteful mother the true aduocate for mannes soule be medyatryce for this soule at this tyme to the great Judge our lorde god". This type of prayer was often preceded by a prayer to the Trinity, together or severally, and followed by a prayer to the Good Angel.

The Orologium suggests that Mary's intercessory powers are based on her special relationship to Christ and God as mother of God, on what she did and suffered for Jesus, and her faithfulness through the Passion.<sup>608</sup> The Exornatorium curatorum explains why every man should call on her "for helpe and comferte and assystence":

For she may helpe vs and succoure vs for she  
 is moste of power vnder god/and doubtles she wyll  
 helpe vs ~~and~~ succoure vs if we call vnto hyr/for  
 she is the mother of mercy and of pyte. And our  
 specyall adoucate for to shewe ~~and~~ present all our  
 causes and||our necessytyes to the hyghe Iuge of heuen  
 hyr owne blyssed sone. And doubtles it is not to be  
 thought yt suche a noble sone so louynge and so gentyll  
 vnto his mother wyll denye hyr ony thyng that she asketh/  
 wherfore lette euery man and woman at all tymes but  
 specyally at the houre of deth call vnto hyr for helpe  
~~and~~ succoure... 609

Copland's editions of the xv Oos<sup>610</sup> and the Jesus Psalter<sup>611</sup> include  
 general petitions to the Blessed Virgin, but apart from the threat of  
 death they are not common. In the dyenge creature she is sought as  
 "moder of orphans", "consolacyon of theym that ben dyssolate/she is guyde  
 to all that be oute of the waye" and worshipped as Queen of Heaven.  
 The treatise suggests two main reasons why the creature should make his  
 appeal to her: the first is the special closeness of her relationship  
 to the glorious Trinity, especially the Second Person:

for her chastyte her pure virgynite here mekenesse  
 her vertue and her constaunce was cause that she  
 was chosen by all ye hole glorious trynyte to be  
 daughter mother and spouse to the moost glorious  
 trynyte and that she shold bere hym that sholde  
 redeme all mankynde from dampnacyon/who may so  
 well be aduocatryse to the fader the sone and the  
 holy goost as she..."; 612

and the second is her motherly involvement with her son's mission, her  
 joy at the redemption of the world, and her deep compassion for His  
 sufferings and the sufferings of those He came to save.<sup>613</sup> The  
 treatises seem to be in general agreement about the merits and faith  
 of the Blessed Virgin, and her unique relationship to the Son and through  
 Him to God the Father, which make her peculiarly fitted to intercede for  
 mankind. The frequency with which she is sought in the face of death  
 suggests that her motherly love and sympathy were particularly attractive

in the shadow of judgement, when her son must appear in the role of Judge rather than Saviour of mankind. In view of the widespread popular devotion to Our Lady evinced by the contents of many Horae - which usually included the Hours of Our Lady, perhaps the Rosary of Our Lady and various other prayers - by the dedication of churches, shrines and sanctuaries to her, and by the ubiquity of images of Mary,<sup>614</sup> she seems strangely neglected in the English devout treatises of the early sixteenth century. It looks as though popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin was of another kind than that which found expression in the treatises, that it was liturgically based, and on her own she rarely appeared as the object of devout contemplation.

### Judgement

The Last Things do not only concern the final destiny of the individual soul, but of mankind in general and the world. One of the signs which it was believed would show that the end of the world was imminent was that of the fifteen tokens of natural disorder, usually attributed to St. Jerome. The other main sign was the intensification of the struggle with evil, which was often bound up with the legend of the birth and coming of Antichrist. Despite Jesus' warning that "of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father",<sup>615</sup> there have always been those who attempted to predict when the End would come, and from time to time groups and individuals have tried to anticipate it by realizing their ideals in the present age.<sup>616</sup>

The enormous popularity of prognostications of various kinds which



were printed during the sixteenth century points to a widespread interest in the future.<sup>617</sup> In addition to predictions concerning the individual's future, or political-religious prophecy such as Osiander's Coniectures of the ende of the worlde, there lived on a legendary - apocalyptic strain which concerned itself with the end of all things. The apocalyptic words of Jesus, Mark XIII, themselves rooted in the tradition of the Jewish apocalyptic, lay behind the legend of the fifteen signs before the Day of Doom.<sup>618</sup> The Fifteen tokens were included in The crafte to lyue well and to dye well and in A lytel treatyse the whiche speketh of the xv. tokens the whiche shullen bee shewed afore yt drefull daye of Iugement. Versions were to be found in numerous earlier English works,<sup>619</sup> and they are listed, with the ascription to St. Jerome, by the seventeenth-century author Isaac Ambrose;<sup>620</sup> in addition they are illustrated in the "Pricke of conscience" window at All Saints', North Street, York, and the printed texts <sup>were</sup> accompanied by wood cuts; also they were the subject of a tapestry at the Ewelme almshouses, Oxfordshire. There is no doubt that they were widely known in ~~the~~ fifteenth-century England and they were not forgotten in the following century.

In the mid 1530's Robert Wyer printed a small volume bearing on its title page the words "As ~~the~~ Cronimus, sheweth In this begynnynge, so wyll I wryte of the.iiij. Tokens the whiche shall be shewed afore the dredeful daye of Dome, of our Lorde Thesu Christe". This is an extraction of the four general signs which precede the fifteen tokens, which Wyer has lifted word for word - even copying the word "menschen" - from the version he found in Doesburgh's translation, with no attempt to <sup>account</sup> for its independent existence.<sup>621</sup> As they stand these four preparatory

tokens (of which Heist makes no mention) are far more general than the specific unnatural portents of the fifteen tokens.<sup>622</sup>

The first of the four tokens is that Satan, who was bound by Christ's victory over death, will be unloosed for a time to test the chosen with still more temptation and tribulation, so that the good will become better and the wicked even more evil. Secondly, love will wax cold: men have only to look about them to see that God is served without devotion and torn to pieces by blasphemers, while the naked and hungry die for lack of mercy. Thirdly, sin and evil will triumph over the fear of God, and the reader has only to look about him to see plenty of evidence that pride and selfishness are dominant and that great sins are being committed. Finally, "afore the other .xv. tokens, ~~and~~ afore the great orryble day of Dome", there will be war among nations and between towns throughout the world. Cloisters of monks and nuns will be banished and their places filled by "peruertes". It will be as Jeremiah prophesied; men will not trust each other, brothers will deceive one another and children their parents; people will care for nothing but to gather their own riches; there will also be signs in nature, famines, earth<sup>7</sup>quakes, plagues and storms. In its original context the latter part of this fourth general sign would have led into the fifteen tokens. As it stands, however, The .iiij. tokens suggests the decay of the world and the urgent need for repentance and penance in a manner akin to the type of mournful analysis of the lamentable estate of this present world found, for example, at the opening of The Pomander of prayer. In both types of work God's direct intervention in history is assumed.

The Last Judgement was a familiar scene in the decoration of numerous churches,<sup>623</sup> and in some versions the Blessed Virgin is shown interceding on behalf of the sinful soul by adding the weight of her rosary to tip the scales in the sinner's favour - an iconographical expression of Mary's mercy, so often sought by the dying.<sup>624</sup> In addition to church decoration the judgement was illustrated in manuscripts and printed books,<sup>625</sup> it was represented on stage in the Chester, Towneley, York and Ludus Coventry cycles,<sup>626</sup> and described by many preachers;<sup>627</sup> but the subject was apparently eschewed by the English lyric writers, and the magnificent Dies Irae did not become a regular sequence in the mass of the dead until much later in the sixteenth century. Despite his attempt to control the fear of judgement the author of To teche a man to dye and not to feare deathe never denies the reality of "a rygorous accomptes". Indeed, he lists several advantages of the threat of judgement: it stirs up devotion, and makes people trust entirely in God's mercy,<sup>628</sup> and later, when he expresses disapproval of the use of the threat of hell, the Devil and judgement,<sup>629</sup> he is challenging the purpose for which they are commonly used rather than their existence. Though men should be taught primarily to love and trust God there is still a place for fear of judgement in his scheme. A very different type of author, William Bonde, is also worried by "vndiscrete consyderacion of the Iustice of god, or of the paynes of hell", which encourages servile fear,<sup>630</sup> and he saw the danger of the individual's meditation on judgement or damnation usurping the secret sentence of God.

I wol graunte to the yt in tyme and place it is  
good a man to remembre dampnacion/and in his  
meditacion to recount with him selfe as he were  
byfore ye iudgement of god remembryng his synnes.  
the iustice of god. the paynes of hell/for syn/  
and suche other, 631

but such meditation must remain general and not attempt to define the sentence. The vision of the Last Judgement must have been very familiar, and it seems to have been used rather indiscriminately to frighten people into good behaviour, pious works and almsgiving. By the 1530s the reality of the judgement does not seem to have been questioned, <sup>ut</sup> but responsible authors were advising caution in the way it was to be used in meditation.

Although there are plenty of references to the judgement in the devout treatises, especially those concerned with death,<sup>632</sup> they are nearly all general references to the fact of judgement; there is no attempt made to describe the scene in any detail. Probably because the judgment scene was so familiar to people from church decoration the devout treatise writers did not consider it necessary to describe it. One of the more detailed accounts is to be found in the Cordiale, whose extant English editions fall well outside the 1530s. The author there makes use of biblical quotation and a "proof" of St. Bernard to describe the appearance of the Judge before going on to describe the Judgement in more detail. In his description of the judgement the distinction between the particular judgement of the individual soul immediately after death and the last and general judgement is not always clear; he seems to refer sometimes to the particular judgement as well as the general judgement. He deals in turn with three aspects of judgement: the accusations of the sinner's own words and works, <sup>and</sup> of Christ; the account which must be given, where nothing can be hidden and where, among other things, the sinner will have to declare whether he has kept his body well in discipline, in the labour of good works and in penance; and finally the Judge's passing sentence, with the doubt as to whether the sentence

will be good or bad, the horror of the division between the sheep and the goats, the awful thunder of the Lord's voice, and the fiends waiting to drag the condemned souls off to hell the moment the judgement is given. Meditation upon these aspects of judgement, especially the pronouncement of the sentence, is recommended on the authority of saints Jerome and Gregory as a preservative against sin.<sup>633</sup>

The crafte to lyue well and to dye well also contains a long chapter on "The Grete Iugement". Nominally the emphasis falls upon the process of judgement, but in fact the author devotes most of his attention to general moral teaching, the avoidance of particular sins, stewardship of time and of goods, and so on. The successive parts of the judgement are distinguished by seven thunders, derived from the opening of the tenth chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John, and in an additional section at the end the author expounds the difference between particular and general judgement. The first <sup>h</sup>thunder heralds the resurrection of the dead; a long procession of saints and sinners, religious and devils, headed by Adam, shall come forth to judgement. The second thunder marks the separation of mankind into four orders; the blessed, who will sit as assessors with Christ; faithful Christians, who will be placed on Christ's right hand; fallen Christians, who will be banished to hell; and finally pagans and heretics, to whom no judgement will be shown. The third thunder introduces the longest section, in which sinners are convicted by the instruments of Christ's Passion and God demands account of all thoughts and words, the way in which a soul has ordered and disposed of his goods and the use he has made of his time. It is a formidable list which gives the author considerable scope to reiterate familiar general moral teaching. The fourth thunder introduces three



accusers which witness against man; his sins, the Devil and the world. The fifth thunder, no more than a sentence in length, refers to the laments of the damned. The sixth thunder marks the sentence of God; and the seventh mentions briefly, but does not describe, hell and heaven, the final destination of the damned and the saved. Although the distinction between the last three sections is somewhat contrived, the author does manage to suggest to his readers something of the process of judgement, what he must be prepared to face, and who will question and judge him. As so often, the description of judgement is clearly intended as a warning to the reader to amend his life, do penance for his sins, and hold himself in continual readiness for the summons to judgement.

It is much more usual to describe the soul's reaction to judgement than the setting and process of it. The influential Medytacyons of Saynt Bernarde contains a brief description of the soul's "quakyng ~~and~~ tremblyng in the Iugement before our lorde",<sup>634</sup> especially when the book is opened "wherin all my purposes desires ~~and~~ <sup>&</sup> thoughtes shall be rehersed in ye presence <sup>of</sup> almyghty god", and the soul must render accounts and receive the sentence. In his chapter "Of the last iugement and peynes deputed for synne", III:24, A Kempis reminds the sinner that he will have to appear before the righteous and incorruptible Judge, from whom nothing can be hidden. He does not describe the occasion in any more detail, but together with the threat of the pains of purgatory and hell, described in a little more detail, the threat of judgement was clearly considered sufficient warning against indulgence in and love of the things of this world, without the need of elaborate description.

A few authors, however, paused to dwell upon one aspect of the judge, who was not God the Father but Christ, still bearing the wounds of His Passion. From the last article of the creed as given by Mirk in his Instructions for Parish Priests it is clear that the second coming of Christ was often identified with the Last Judgement:

pat cryst schale come on domes day  
 wyþ hys woundes fresch and rede  
 To deme þe quyke and þe dede.<sup>635</sup>

In illustrations of the Last Judgement Christ is usually shown naked <sup>for</sup> save a cloak, His wounds clearly visible, and sometimes with a sword and a lily—justice and mercy—coming from his mouth, as in the appropriate illustration of The mystic sweet rosary. The Last Judgement play of <sup>xxv</sup> the Chester cycle presents a rather different picture, as indicated by the stage direction: "descendet Iesus quasi in nube, si fieri poterit... Stabunt Angeli cum Cruce, Corona, Spinea, lancea, aliisque, Instrumentis, omnia demonstrantes".<sup>636</sup> A little earlier Christ had commanded his angels to wake the dead and bring them to Judgement, and added:

Shew you my Crosse apertly here,  
 Crown of Thornes, Sponge and Spear,  
 and Neiles, to them that wanted never  
 to come to this anye;

and later as He begins to give sentence He particularly emphasizes the shedding of His blood.<sup>637</sup>

In his Good Friday sermon for 1536 Longland describes not only how Christ's wounds accuse the Jews,<sup>638</sup> but he reproaches the Christian with his sinful life:

O vnkynde christen man, <sup>what</sup> shalte thou ley for thyn  
 excuse att ye daye of iudgement whenne this shal be  
 layde annenste the? whenne thy iudge god shall ley  
 this vnto thy chardge. Whan he shall shewe the,  
 the crown of thorne, the scourges, the buffates, the  
 strokes, ye crosse the nayle, the aysell, the gall,  
 the sharpe spere, the woundes and all the artillery

& armes of hys passion: when he shall ley  
to thy chardge, that yu ware the doer of hyt  
that thou war the cause and occasyon of his  
passion and deathe? 639

Following the Doesburgh edition of the XV Tokens<sup>640</sup> is a detailed description of Christ's showing of the instruments of His Passion at Judgement, where every instrument is related to <sup>a</sup>specific sin. The particular instrument, illustrated by a woodcut, is shown to each group of sinners, thus: the column of scourging to the unmerciful; the crown of thorn to the proud, who have loved the world and not cared that Christ suffered; the lance to the angry; his wounded hands to the covetous; the cross to the impatient; and so on, through fifteen tokens. A similar list is to be found in "The grete Iugement" chapter of The crafte of lyue well and to dye well. In Doesburgh's version each of the tokens is basically a condemnation of some particular sin, which frequently includes some comment on the sin and perhaps quotation from one of the fathers, such as Ambrose or Bernard, or even the philosopher Seneca; there is also an element of reproach in the condemnation. Christ says to the damned:

loke here the wondes the whiche ye haue made hem.  
loke here the syde whiche ye haue wonded and dore  
passed wyth a spere. loke here my handes the whiche  
bee thorough nayled for your sake on the crosse. the  
whiche I haue put oute for to receyue you hadde it  
plesed you. And for that case that ye haue cared not  
for my. And I haue called and cryed after you and  
ye haue sette not thinge be me. 641

Similar complaints are to be found at greater length in all the Last Judgement plays of the English cycles except <sup>the</sup> Ludus Coventriae. The sentence which follows, "Therefore goo ye in that euerlasting fyre...", is the final condemnation of those for whom Christ has suffered so much but in vain. In addition, then, to their most obvious devotional use, to stimulate love and compassion for Christ and thus indirectly inculcate a hatred of sin, Christ's wounds and the signs of His Passion add emotional



weight to the Judgement scene, There is more to it than just fear, and a touch of irony: the wounds and other instruments, which are the sinner's greatest hope and his refuge, turn to condemn the unrepentant sinner after death.

### Purgatory

It is impossible to leave out<sup>of</sup> the account the place of purgatory, which in the twenty-five years ~~which~~<sup>that</sup> followed the publication of Luther's ninety-five Theses was one of the most conspicuous issues debated in England between Catholics and those who sympathized with the new Protestant theology. Much of the debate was printed in English, and thus available to a wider audience than ~~the~~ most earlier theological debates, although the debate was virtually confined to the late 1520s - early 1530s. Protestant authors continued to attack the doctrine of purgatory as unscriptural and dishonouring to Christ.<sup>642</sup> Because the issue was doctrinal it tended to be dealt with separately and to find little reflection in devotional writings. A warning against false heretics who denied the existence of purgatory was sounded at least as early as the end of the fifteenth century in some of the pieces included in L'Art de bien mourir.<sup>643</sup> The Carthusian author of The Pomander of prayer repeated the warning; "in these days there be many heretykes that saye and affyrme that there is no purgatory". He continues:

I myght bryng in diuers auctorites of holy scripture to confute this false opinion with/ but as nowe I wyll let them passe/partly bycause that of late catholicall and greate famous clerkes

in theyr boke lately compyled: hath confuted  
 suche opinions/moche more strongly than my  
 symple lexyng is able to do. And partely  
 bycause it was my purpose in the begynnyng  
 to write this poore treatyse as an erudicion  
 of prayer to suche as haue but small or none  
 vnderstandyng in holy scripture/and nott as a  
 confutacion of heretykes. 644

He also advises his readers not to debate the matter with heretics,  
 especially those of superior learning, for fear that their arguments  
 may prove persuasive and draw the unlearned away from the belief of  
 the Church.

The passage in Sir Thomas More's Supplication of Souls<sup>645</sup> paints  
 a vivid picture of the pains of purgatory to inspire pity and so  
 encourage the living to pray for the poor souls. The author of  
The Pomander also attempts to mollify men's hard hearts by describing  
 the sufferings of the souls in hell and reminding the living that if  
 they were to experience such pain "howe glade he wolde be to be released  
 by the merites of suffrages and prayers".<sup>646</sup> The pains of purgatory,  
 traditionally seven in number and often similar to the pains of hell,  
 were frequently described in detail and referred to more generally  
 during the fifteenth century;<sup>647</sup> and the seven pains are enumerated as  
 late as the middle of the sixteenth century in A lytell boke that speketh  
 of Purgatorye, which provides the most detailed popular exposition of  
 the traditional doctrines of purgatory still extant in printed form.<sup>648</sup>  
 Clearly the threat of the pains of purgatory generated considerable  
 fear - part of the fear of death. Erasmus in his Preparation to deathe  
 describes some of the remedies, in his view ineffectual, which were  
 popularly used to alleviate this fear, and singles out the buying of  
 pardons, a precaution taken by George in Funus, as a particularly

popular defence. He feels that the prayers and masses are a better defence, but the best remedy is to stir up a man's faith towards God and his neighbour. The author of the treatise To teche a man to deye goes still further, and suggests that where a man has faith in Christ and knows himself forgiven, hell and purgatory will cease to frighten him:

And yf hell can do nothings/what can purgatory do?  
yf there were any soche as we haue feared so greatly  
this many yeares? which purgatory though it be but  
only an ymaginacion of false ypocrites/and no fyre  
in verydede/yet many men stonde in more feare of it/  
then of the fyre of hell/so euell are we instructe  
and taught/but oure synnes haue deserued it,<sup>650</sup>

Other reformers were even more outspoken, and Veron's The Huntynge of Purgatorye to death, printed but apparently not for the first time in 1561, was one of the most substantial refutations, claiming to provide "sufficient armoure <sup>&</sup> weapons for to withstand and beate down ...the found maynetayners of thys blasphemouse doctryne of Purgatorye." It is most unlikely that the chantries act of 1547 ended belief in purgatory and the desire to provide masses for the souls of the departed. But although religious belief cannot immediately be controlled by statutory legislation the ending of the chantry provision must in time, in the course of Elizabeth's reign, have assisted the decline of an active belief in purgatory.<sup>651</sup>

The lytell boke that speketh of Purgatorye enunciated clearly the view that there were two purgatories, one on earth and one beneath it.<sup>652</sup>

Purgatory on earth is basically the patient endurance of every kind of tribulation in this life and the acceptance of death whenever it comes. The tenth petition of the Jesus Psalter, "Iesu. Iesu. Iesu.

sende me here my purgatory", expresses the belief found in the tribulation treatises and the ars moriendi books that to suffer patiently in this life is almost to guarantee a heavenly reward whereby the soul will escape the worst torments of purgatory. But it was the other purgatory, which the souls of the dead had to endure, that was the more influential in public and private devotion. As the sermons in the Festial and the Speculum Sacer<sup>d</sup>otale show, All Soul<sup>s</sup> day was the Church's annual remembrance of "all þe sowles þat <sup>ben</sup> yn purgatory, hauyng full beleue for to relesch hom of hor payne, other yn parte, othyr yn all",<sup>654</sup> but prayer for the departed was by no means confined to one day in the year; it was the unceasing duty of every living Christian. All prayer was of assistance to the poor souls in purgatory, especially when said on a Sunday<sup>655</sup> or during mass or on All Soul<sup>s</sup> day. The poor souls were remembered in each celebration of the mass; outside some churches, such as Bisley, Gloucestershire,<sup>656</sup> there stood a light of the dead; numerous monumental brasses appealed to the charity of the passer-by with some version of the formula "Orate pro anima...", and on the other ~~xxxix~~ hand numerous prayers and image pietatis woodcuts promised remission of years in purgatory to the devout:<sup>657</sup> the dead could not be forgotten, but neither was their service without profit to those who survived:

My orayson the qwyche I do for the saowllys  
of purgatory shal retowrn in my bosum and  
shal proffyt to me for to haue ewyrgylestand  
lyue. 658

Although, as we have seen, the author of Dives and Pauper and A Kempis<sup>659</sup> warn against relying too much upon the devotion of friends to fulfil the necessary obligations after a man is dead, much remained

for them to do. The tenth chapter of "The nedyll of the fere dyuynne for to deye well" in the Crafte to lyue well and to dye well suggests that the poor souls should be remembered not only on account of the pains they suffer but because they are the inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, and from Paradise they may be of considerable assistance to one who has yet to die. The chapter contains one of the most detailed lists of the occasions when, and the ways in which, the living should remember and seek to assist the souls in purgatory.<sup>660</sup> The fifteen points, for which the authority of holy doctors is claimed, show how many pious customs could be used to remember and assist the poor souls; these include lighting candles, remembering them when the incense was lit in church, offering bread and wine for them at mass, praying for them to the saints and the Blessed Virgin, having masses said for them, remembering them when they are prayed for, and by "fastynges & ~~and~~ abstynences/knelynges prosternacyons (sic) made in the worlde" and by accomplishing works of mercy spiritual and corporal for them. Apart from forgiving the dead any offences they had committed, those who survive are encouraged to pay the debts of departed souls, fulfil their last will, and accomplish outstanding vows and penance. The ways in which the living could help the dead were usually suggested in more general terms, which must have been widely known from the frequency with which they are mentioned. The Festial lists devout prayer, almsgiving and mass-singing as the chief ways to assist the poor souls; while the author of the Spiritus Guydonis goes into considerable detail about the kind of mass offices and prayers which are most helpful to the dead,<sup>661</sup> but he also mentions almsdeeds, as does the fiftieth chapter of The Kalendar of Sheparden, together with



prayer and fasting.<sup>662</sup> Thus, those things which were advocated as being of the greatest value to the souls of the living—the mass, prayer and good works—benefitted the living and the dead, an encouragement to survivors to assist their departed friends. The weakness of the traditional doctrine of purgatory as presented in the devout treatises was the suggestion that God required man to suffer and if he did not fulfil his designated measure of suffering through the tribulations of this life the balance would have to be paid hereafter in purgatory. Despite the clear distinction drawn between hell and purgatory, where the pain "is passaunt" and where souls receive consolation from visits of good angels, relief from the suffrages of their friends and have the certain hope of eternal beatitude, the intensity of the pains to be endured made it a fearful place, and the God who would consign a soul to such purgation must have seemed just to the exclusion of all mercy.

### Hell

In the Dyalogue of comforte Sir Thomas More, stout upholder of traditional catholic belief, laments the way in which men's affections wax cold towards heaven, so that "If dread of hell were as far gone, verye fewe woulde feare God".<sup>663</sup> As it is, when a preacher describes the pains of hell towards the end of his sermon his congregation are roused from their lethargy and pay attention.<sup>664</sup> There was a rich store of iconographical tradition and legend for the preachers and treatise writers to draw upon. Some concept of hell seems to have

developed in most of the major religions and to have been elaborated and become more vivid and concrete as time went on.<sup>665</sup> Ideas such as the ladder, pictured in the twelfth-century Doom painting at Chaldon, Surrey; the bridge, which features in a number of the visions, including Visio Tundalis, St. Patrick's Purgatory and the Vision of Thurkel; and even the familiar weighing of souls<sup>666</sup> — all have their counterparts in non-Christian traditions of hell.

However, late fifteenth – early sixteenth century English congregations who saw representations of hell's mouth or of the devils who ruled the infernal regions are most unlikely to have known of any non-Christian analogues.<sup>667</sup> Representations of hell's mouth were to be found in England before the conquest,<sup>668</sup> and there is a splendid one in the mid-twelfth-century Winchester Psalter.<sup>669</sup> By the late fifteenth century the hell's mouth was illustrated in church decoration, in manuscripts and woodcuts,<sup>670</sup> and it seems to have been a regular stage property for the appropriate part of a number of mystery play cycles.<sup>671</sup> Of fearsome aspect itself, it threatened worse punishment within: the plays, wisely, made no attempt to show the pains of the damned. Devils of many kinds were very often depicted in church decorations and book illustrations,<sup>672</sup> for example crowding round the bed of the dying man in the illustrated ars moriendi books, or inflicting punishment upon the damned,<sup>673</sup> and they appeared in the Judgement plays of the mystery cycles dragging souls off to hell. The third part of the Cordiale discusses hell in some detail, listing the names of hell, describing the nature of its fire, and then dealing with the devils, their great strength and their lust for vengeance: "And therefore they be so paynted in the churche with hydeous ~~and~~ <sup>&</sup> horryble fygures".<sup>674</sup>

Written descriptions of hell tend to focus on the sufferings inflicted upon the damned:

In helle is great morenynge  
Great trouble of crynge  
Of Thonder noyses rorynge.  
With plenty of wylde fyre  
Betynge with great strokes lyke gonnes  
With a great froste in water ronnes  
And after a bytter wynde comes  
whiche gothe thorough the soules with yre  
There is Bothe thyrste and hunger  
Fendes with hokes pulleth theyr flesshe a sonder  
They fyght and curse/and eche on other wonder  
with the syght of the deuylles dredable  
There is shame and confusyou (sic)  
Rumoure of consyence for euyll lyunge  
They curse them selfe with great crynge  
In smoke and stynke they be euermore lyenge  
with other paynes innumerable. 675

Descriptions of the pains of hell seem to have been elaborated in the context of visions of the other world. For instance, the Book of Enoch, whose second section is dated by R.H. Charles to the first half of the <sup>first</sup> century B.C.,<sup>676</sup> is announced as being a vision, and Enoch is accompanied by an angelic guide.<sup>677</sup> The second and third parables of this section are much concerned with judgement, both the first judgement of the angels and the Final Judgement, and the place of punishment is usually seen in terms of a deep valley where darkness, fire, chains of iron and bronze, scourges and floods variously afflict the wicked. They will suffer acute pain and a penance of great shame, and their repentance will be unavailing. In view of Owst's comments on the medieval preaching of Judgement<sup>678</sup> it is interesting to note that vengeance falls particularly upon the kings, the mighty, the exalted and those who rule the earth, and that their punishment will be a spectacle enjoyed by the Elect.<sup>679</sup>



There were various Christian visions of the other world<sup>680</sup> dating from the second century, of which some of the more influential for the descriptions of the pains of hell were the Apocalypse of Peter, the Visio Sancti Pauli and the visions in the Dialogues of Saint Gregory.<sup>681</sup> Both The mirroure of golde for the Synfull <sup>soule</sup> and the Coriale cite St. Gregory in their description of hell.<sup>682</sup> It is, however, to a pseudo-Augustinian homily and later to Comester's Historia scholastica<sup>683</sup> that we must look for the apparent source of a vision which in its late fifteenth-early sixteenth century form seems to have concerned itself almost exclusively with the descriptions of the seven pains of hell, the Vision of Lazarus.<sup>684</sup> The setting is the supper at Bethany of which Jesus partook six days before His death.<sup>685</sup> Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, was there as well, and with the Lord's consent he proceeded to tell Simon and the others "suche paynes as he han sene in helle and in purgatory". This vision of Lazarus is recounted briefly in the Goostly treatyse of the passyon of Christ,<sup>686</sup> and in similar but not identical versions in The crafte to lyue well and to dye well and The Kalendar of Shephardes, both of which are illustrated; the latter gives briefer descriptions of the punishments and is more overtly moralistic. Each of the seven pains is shown to be the punishment for indulgence in one of the seven deadly sins. The proud are bound upon incessantly-turning spiked wheels, the envious are plunged in an icy flood and blasted by cold winds, the bodies of the wrathful are pierced, and "detrenched" by "the most horryble and ferefull bochers of helle", the slothful are confined in a dark hall, tormented and stung by serpents, covetous people are immersed in cauldrons of molten metals and boiling oil, gluttons are

fed with toads and venemous beasts and made to drink foul water, and the lecherous are tormented in deep wells full of fire and sulphur. There is no particular attempt to match the crime to the punishment except for the gluttons, <sup>as</sup> ~~and~~ the ninth chapter of The Nedyll of the fere dyuyne in The crafte (which deals generally with "many paynes infernalles") says, meditation on the pains described should be a good enough reason for every man to resist the devil and temptation.

A number of pains described in the Vision of Lazarus are to be found in other visions. The pain of the icy flood and the bitter wind recurs in the Visio Tundalis and St. Patrick's Purgatory, while the spiked wheel and the molten metals are to be found in the Visio Sancti Pauli.<sup>687</sup> The fullest description of the pains of hell, drawn from various sources including the Visio Tundalis and the Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, is in an undated book printed by Robert Wyer, Examples howe mortall synne maketh the synners inobedyentes to haue many paynes and dolours within the fyre of Hell. Knowing Wyer's propensity for extracting and printing as separate books sections from larger volumes, it is not surprising to find that these Examples are extracted from the "Peni Inferni" section of deWorde's The floure of the commaundmentes of god.<sup>688</sup> The pains here are worked out in greater detail than in the Vision of Lazarus, so that in some instances they perhaps fascinate the reader rather than frightening him, especially where imaginative ingenuity demands more attention than the suffering of the damned: the rich man in the chair of the fire, the knight clad in armour full of wounding darts, and the noble man who oppressed the poor, are of this kind.<sup>689</sup> On the other hand in the

vision of Tundale, the longest example given, the punishments are not so localized; they involve not individuals but numerous souls in an endless process and there is a suggestion of malignant, elemental power at work. Tundale travels from one place to another seeing the oven with flames, the cruel beast and the icy pond, the valley of the smiths and the pit of hell, and the reader builds up a cumulative picture of the vast extent of hell as well as the variety of its torments.

Apart from the vision literature the pains of hell are more usually described briefly in general terms, although as might be expected it is sometimes possible to find pieces of description which recall the visions:

In helle is colde intollerable. Fyre withoute  
lyghte/the whiche shall euer endure. Styngynge  
wormes euer busy tormentynge incessantly. Stenche  
or sauour infortunate/for any man to sauour. And  
darkenes/whiche may be felte: and tormentes/whiche shall  
euer endure. And abhomynall (sic) ~~and~~ terryble syghtes  
of deuylls ~~and~~ despyracyon of all good werkes, 690

St. Bernard's Medytacyons indicated the physical and mental pains of hell - the latter is described in many treatises as remorse of conscience - the sorrow, the "incomparable stenche", the horrible dread and the total absence of any hope of mercy.<sup>691</sup> He asks the reader to choose between such a fate and "the rewardes of blessed soules" in heaven, which he goes on to describe in the next chapter. The mirroure of golde is another work which juxtaposes "the Ioyes of paradyse/and paynes of hell". The contrast itself offered adequate comment and made elaborate description of hell or of heaven unnecessary. The author of the Cordiale too contrasts hell with the promise of heaven, which he goes on to describe in the next and last part of his work. His

third part closes with a statement of choice:

... I haue suffysantely shewed you the manyfolde maners of the dyuerse paynes of helle/and howe vayllable and to what proufyte groweth the memoryale Remembraunce therof. ~~On~~ mortall man/what errorr/ what folye/and what faute is in the/whenne it lyeth in thy free arbytrement to haue Ioyes euerlastyng and wyllingly castest thy selfe in to the Infernall tourmentes and paynes/from whens none may retourne. but brenne there in fyre worlde without ende. 692

Teaching about the pains of hell certainly survived into the 1530s, and the traditional view of hell as a location within the cosmos where the damned were tormented was probably accepted by the majority of devout treatise readers. Wyer's Examples howe mortall synne... dates from the 1530s or the 1550s, and The myrrour or lokynge glass of lyfe, probably printed during the 1530s, still recommends as "A good rule for a man to brynge vp youth" that he should teach those under his charge "of the moste horryble paynes of hell: prepayred for all them whiche dyspyse the trewth/<sup>&</sup>and folowe theyr owne lustes and pleasures". However, there were signs during the same decade that some authors were interpreting hell in a more personal, interior sense. The author of the "Consolacyon for troubled consciences" relates the feeling, the pain of hell, to man's inherently sinful nature. This awareness of his own wickedness should warn a man to accept the lighter burden of tribulation in this life rather than risk feeling the full weight of his ~~own~~ iniquity:

If truely he dyd feale his euyl/he shulde feale very hell/for he hath helle in him selfe. Thou wilt axe howe? The prophete sayeth euery man is a lyer. And ageyn/Everyman lyuing is all vanyte. To be vayne and a lyar is to be voyd of truth/and to be voyd of truth is to be with out god/and to be nothing. And that is to be in hell/<sup>&</sup>and dampned. 693

Erasmus describes remorse of conscience as "the ~~p~~en most painful of al peines"<sup>694</sup>, which afflicted sinners during this life and formed a significant part of their torments after death. A myrrour or glasse for them that be syke<sup>695</sup> makes it even clearer that hell is not confined to a specific place nor is it an exclusively post-mortem experience. Cain and Judas for example knew that the hell of the unrighteous begins on earth. The author sees hell as rebellion against God; the ungodly who do not love God cannot escape hell. Tobias tells Lazarus that hell is nothing but fear and dread of death, and for the faithful Christian who believes in the power of Christ's resurrection the threat of hell is banished. The third chapter heading of Frith's Preparation to deathe makes the same point: "To the electe and faythfull, eternall deathe by Christe is ouercome". Like the author of the "Consolacyon for troubled consciences" the writers of the Myrrour for them that be syke believes that he who perceives the extent of his own wickedness is in hell. Some sixty years later Marlowe's Mephistopheles answered Dr. Faustus' question about the location of hell, thus:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd  
In one selfe place, for where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, must we ever be. 696

Milton's Satan knew the pain of remorse, and his visit to paradise did not abate his sufferings:

...horror and doubt distract  
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stirr  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
One step no more then from himself can fly  
By change of place... 697



Even in the twentieth century, in Eliot's Cocktail Party, Edward declares "Hell is oneself. Hell is alone".

To the Protestant authors of the 1530s true faith, living belief in Christ, gave security against the threat of hell. They did not deny the existence of hell, but they did help <sup>to alter</sup> the traditional concept of hell as an actual location in which the wicked experience physical punishment and eternal pain for their sins. The pains of hell are thought of in the "Consolacyon" and the Myrrour for them that be syke in terms of mental anguish which results from a person's recognition of his own sinfulness; they can therefore be experienced before death. These authors seem to have abandoned the traditional idea of hell as a place, and developed the concept which earlier authors would have described as remorse of conscience.

Although Protestants preferred a more personal interpretation of hell they could not remove from the Creeds the clause which asserts that Christ descended into hell. In his Catechism<sup>698</sup> Thomas Becon cites as authority for the Descent three biblical passages, Psalm XVI: 10; I. Peter III:19; IV:6,<sup>699</sup> and he sees it as proof of Christ's victory over sin and death. "He went not down unto hell as a guilty person to suffer, but as a valiant prince to conquer, and as a most puissant and glorious king to triumph over his enemies, and to make us also lords and conquerors of Satan and of all his infernal army". Where it receives any attention in Protestant works the descent into hell is seen as a kind of mirror image of Christ's Resurrection victory. In general it was not an episode they chose to emphasize: it was too closely related to the non-scriptural medieval harrowing of hell traditions.

But although the Protestants sought to demythologize the legends in much the same way as they banished images, paintings and stained glass as non-scriptural and tending to encourage superstition, their emphasis upon the Resurrection faith expresses in ~~an~~ different terms a similar sense of joy, hope and triumph to that voiced by the patriarchs in the Chester play and the Gospel of Nicodemus when Christ comes to release them.

Stories of descents to the other world, sometimes to rescue a dead relative, or to seek a boon or even to free the damned, are to be found in many mythologies.<sup>700</sup> In Christian thought, knowledge of and belief in Christ's descent into Hades, His triumph over death, His preaching to the souls in prison and their release, seem to have developed from at least the second century onwards.<sup>701</sup> The Gospel of Nicodemus seems to have been one of the most influential versions of the Descensus narrative.<sup>702</sup> It seems to have been immensely popular in the early sixteenth century, being printed at least eight times in under thirty years. It was cited in the Legenda Aurea and The crafte to lyue well and to dye well, and in his Good Friday sermon for 1536 Longland gives an abbreviated account of it.<sup>703</sup> There were several middle English verse translations of it,<sup>704</sup> and it must have influenced Langland's vivid harrowing of hell scene in B Passus XVIII of Piers Plowman<sup>705</sup>; it undoubtedly helped the Chester and York (borrowed by Towneley) dramatists to shape their plays of Christ's descent into hell.<sup>706</sup>

The harrowing of hell narrative occupies only the last third of the Gospel of Nicodemus - the earlier parts cover the Passion and Resurrection of Christ - and it seems originally to have been

a separate work. The setting of the narrative has something in common with the vision literature. Like Lazarus, Thurkel, the Monk of Eynsham, Tundale and other visionaries of the pains of hell or the joys of paradise, Garius and Leucius, the sons of Simeon who have risen from their graves, are commanded by the Jews to explain the reason for their resurrection and to recount their experiences in the other world. Separately they record what they have witnessed, and miraculously their accounts are identical; one paper is given to Nicodemus and Joseph for safe-keeping, the other to Annas and Caiaphas. Having completed their task, "anone they were transfigured ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> was no more seen;" they had returned to their bodies at the command of the Archangel Michael to "shewe to you these holy secretes". The outline of the story is well enough known:<sup>707</sup> Christ enters Hades after His earthly burial, His light penetrates the darkness, the gates of hell are broken down, He is welcomed by the patriarchs but the princes of hell are desperately afraid of Him, He orders Satan to be bound and leads Adam and all the saints to Paradise, where they are joined by Enoch, Elijah and the penitent thief of the crucifixion, all three having come straight to Paradise. As a story it is well constructed, the characterisation is convincing, the debate between Hades and Satan, and Christ's greeting to Adam, are in their different ways expressive and dramatic. ~~Throughout~~ <sup>are used</sup> Scriptural quotations both directly, as in Christ's use of Psalm XXIV:7,9, and in the father's quotation of their own prophecies - an appropriate comment upon the present action - which of course marks their fulfilment - and in the saint's praise of Christ; biblical quotations are mingled to

suggest a liturgical hymn. The legend gave physical shape and form to the essential truth of Christ's resurrection victory, and it could be adapted or elaborated with less restraint than the canonical narratives. Dunbar's poem on the resurrection makes effective use of the legend in its opening verse:

Done is a battell on the dragon blak,  
 Our campioun Chryst confountet hes his force;  
 The yettis of hell ar brokin with a crak,  
 The signe triumphall rasis is of the croce,  
 The divillis' trymmillis with hiddous voce,  
 The saulis ar borrowit and to the blis can go,  
 Chryst with his blud our ranson is dois indoe:  
 Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro.

### Heaven.

Heaven was not easy to describe. The traditional hell was a place full of devilish activity and movement, the tortures were exaggerated versions of pains and tortures known on earth, and even the mental anguish of the wicked could be imagined by intensifying some of the less pleasant feelings which afflict nearly all men at some time. While the vision literature usually provides a fairly competent description of the setting of paradise as a fruitful, temperate country of peace and plenty, in the words of the Lord to Moses: "a good land and a large...a land flowing with milk and honey",<sup>708</sup> it gives no adequate description of how the inhabitants occupy their time. Faced with the need to describe heaven in the final section of his work, the author of the Cordiale confesses "I am as one born blynde" and he resorts to the Apocalypse and brief quotations from other parts of Scripture, St. Augustine and St. Bernard to describe the "souerayn

beaute <sup>8</sup>~~and~~ clerenesse" of heaven.

In attempting to describe what heaven is like more generally, to define the content of that eternal bliss, the author of the Cordiale can do little more than list some of its qualities: "Ther is peas/pyte/bounte/clerenes/lyght/vertu/honeste/glorye/reste/louynge/loue/good concorde/<sup>8</sup>ioye/swetenes/blys/and perdurable lyfe",<sup>709</sup> and to crown all with the beautiful vision. The author of the chapter on the Joys of Paradise in The Crafte to lyue well and to dye well also declares "yt it be impossyble of yt suffyciently to Thynke/too vnderstonde ne pronounce/ne consequently to wryte alonely of the moost lytell ioye of heuen". Despite this disclaimer he not only gives a general description of the joys of heaven but looks in more detail at the satisfaction of the soul's desire, its delectation and above all its "perfyte possessyon of god ye treatoure (sic) without ony fere to lese ye sayd beatytude". He goes on to give some attention to the bodily gifts enjoyed by the blessed, "lyght/impossybylyte/subtylyte/<sup>8</sup>~~and~~ agylyte", and he then dilates upon St. Anselm's fourteen parts of beatitude, of which seven pertain to the glory of the soul: "sapyence/loue/concorde/honoure/suerty/puyssaunce/~~and~~ joy/ye other.vii.partyes of beatytude apperteynyng vnto the bodyes gloryfyed ben beaute/agylyte/strengthe/lybete/helth<sup>8</sup>volupte longenyte". The dissection is sound, but it is not inspiring. Whitford's description of heaven<sup>in</sup> A dayly exercyse is also somewhat pedestrian. He begins by describing the beauty and abundance of the place and passes into a description of the other virtues of heaven. He deploys all his resources of language, varying structure and <sup>rhythm</sup>~~metre~~, using internal rhyme and alliteration to convey the "commodités of the body",



which includes:

Beaute and fayrenes, without any deformyte/  
or fadynge. Myght and strength. Without  
debilyte or feblenes helth without syckenes,  
or disease/all pleasure and neuer payne. Euer  
myrth without any mornyng, euer gladnes and neuer  
sadnes. Euer ioy, and neuer sorowe of all thynges  
contentacion without any murmure or grudge. Euer  
loue, and neuer hate. Euer charyte, and neuer  
enuye, mercye, pitye, and compassyon/without any  
crueltye, or vnkyndnes. Euer vnyte and peace and  
neuer varyaunce: ne debate. Euer trouth and fidelite:  
without any falshed or deceyte. Euer iustice equite:  
and ryghte/and neuer oppression/ne wronge. Euer due  
honoure/and reuerence ~~and~~ neuer dysdayne ne dyspyte. 710

It is an impressive list but too long; the set of contrasts dulls rather than stimulates the imagination. Those who attempt to describe what heaven is like seem all too often to end up by listing the various qualities and virtues it must possess.

Some authors avoided the need for precise description by juxtaposing more general descriptions of heaven and hell, allowing them to complement one another. The author of The mirroure of golde does this in his chapter "of the ioyes of paradyse and of the paynes of hell", and the sixth and seventh chapters of the Medytacyons of saynt Bernarde, "Of dethe ~~and~~ also of ye paynes of wycked men after dethe" and "Of the rewardes of blessed soules. And of ye Ioyes of heuen" include several such contrasts. Protestant authors, probably because <sup>of</sup> their views on hell and their disapproval of its use as a weapon of fear, never exploit the contrast between heaven and hell. However, they do make use of what was one of the most successful approaches to the problem of how to describe heaven and make it desirable. Cyprian's sermon Of mortalitie ended by reminding its audience that they dwelt on earth "as pylgrimys and gestes" and that

all should long to return to their heavenly home. Hughe uses this passage from Cyprian to conclude The troubled mans medicine, where he reminds his reader that parents and friends will be waiting there to receive him; "At the syght and metyng of these, oh howe greate gladnes shall happen bothe to vs and them?"<sup>711</sup> The soul will then be received into the "ioyouse companie", which includes apostles, martyrs, prophets and virgins as well as kindred and friends. Whitford may well have had the same passage in mind when he too reminds his reader of the company which awaits him in heaven. His list is more detailed than Cyprian's, and he also mentions:

Ye goodly bright company of angels/alfredy  
to present you vnto our lady the blessyd  
glorious virgyne Marye/and by her with  
them to be recommended/and committed  
vnto her dere sone our lorde/and moste  
swete sauour Iesu;<sup>712</sup>

and Jesus in turn brings the soul "vnto ye presence of his most worthy father which (by him) is also your father". It is this vision of the godhead rather than the social pleasures of the company of the blessed which dominates the prayer of the Disciple of Eternal Wisdom with which the Orologium concludes. He prays to the Lord that:

in þe leste houre of her yeeldyng vp  
þe goost be they blessid of þe. and of  
þy swete moder, þat is þe moder of mercy,  
be þe broughte gloriously to þe kyngedome  
of heuene: where alle þe company and multitude  
of blessid spirites after þe exile and sorowe  
of þis life schullen be ioyfully make drunken  
of grete plente of goddes hows, seiynge þe kyng  
of blesse and lorde of vertues in thy godhede,  
Jhesu criste, oure lorde, whiche with þe fader  
and þy holy gost lyest and regnest god euere  
worlde with - outhen ende. 713

It is to the mystical writers that one must turn for the most inspiring vision of heaven. In the Imitation of Christ the disciple yearns "to have syght/~~and~~<sup>&</sup> contemplacyon of the eternall glory of thy kyngedome", and asks Jesus "whan shalt thou be to me all in all/o whan shall I be with the in thy kyngedome/ the whiche thou haste of thy goodnes preparate to thy louers at the begynnyng?" Although this chapter<sup>714</sup> opens with a description of "the hygh cyte of heuen", bliss, joy and infinity are the only words used to describe it; it is characterized by the clear, shining, eternal light which seems to envelop it and illuminate the saints of heaven. The disciple, caught in the trammels of sin and the world, prays for the help of eternal truth; he asks pardon for his distraction, and begs "O thou heuenly swetenes, come and enter into me/~~and~~<sup>&</sup> chase for me all vnclennes". The final chapter of the Stimulus Amoris<sup>715</sup> uses just four superlatives to describe "the restful place of the high Jerusalem"—highest, brightest, widest and strongest — there is no attempt made to describe what it looks like. Like The Crafte it lists four qualities which the body will enjoy<sup>in</sup> heaven — perfect health, lightness, brightness and unsufferableness—and it also praises the fellowship of heaven as "best, worthiest, fairest, most fervent in charity, <each one to other knit together> with clean love that never shall stint nor cool". The quality of the fellowship is defined in terms of the relationship of its members one to another; there is no mention of apostles, prophets, martyrs or other types of people who make up the company of heaven. At the centre of the fellowship is the soul's possession of "our Lord", and the clear sight of the Holy Trinity, and a little later the Lord wipes

away the tears from their eyes and comforts the blessed "As the mother cherisheth her child". The nature of the soul's relationship to God is suggested by the tender care of the mother for her child, and so the soul is led on to that indescribable inner joy deep in the experience of God. As the Medytacyons of saynt Bernarde puts it:

The rewardes of blessid men ben to beholdes god/  
to lyue wyth god~~and~~ to lyue of god/to be wt god/  
~~and~~ to haue god that is moost noble~~and~~ souereyne  
goodnes. 716

Heaven is not so much a place as a relationship, the fellowship of the saints with one another, and above all the relationship of the individual to God in Christ. The relationship of the individual with Jesus cannot be fully realized in this life, but to the mystic is sometimes granted a foretaste, a glimpse of heaven. Hilton groups together some of the terms often used by the mystics to describe their experience of grace:

This openynge of the goostly eye is that  
lyght darknes and ryche nought that I spake  
of before/and it may be called pouerte of  
spiryte and goostly rest/inwarde stylnes and  
peace of conscience/hyghnes of thought and  
onelynes of soule/a lyghtly felynge of grace  
and preuite of herte/the waker slepe of the  
spouse and tasyng of heuenly sauoure/brennyng  
in loue and shynyng in lyght/entre of contemplacyon/  
and reformyng in felyng. 717

Protestant authors too were prepared to use the mystic's terminology. Lazarus in the Myrrour... for them that be syke as he waits for death longs to be embraced by the bridegroom Christ, while the author of the "Consolacyon for troubled consciences" calls upon his reader to "lifte vp oure hart and ascende vp in to the mountayne of Myrthe with the spouse";<sup>718</sup> and Catharine Parr is content to use A Kempis - like

language: "O Lord Jesu, most louyng spouse, who shall geue me winges of perfect loue, that I may flie vp from these worldely miseries, and rest in the".<sup>719</sup>

The author who attempts to describe heaven as a place or to enumerate its qualities and virtues may be competent and informative but he is unlikely on those grounds alone to inspire a reader to seek the kingdom of heaven. The social heaven, where the soul is re-united with friends and kindred and enjoys the company of apostles, prophets, saints and martyrs, is more attractive. But the desire for heaven is most surely based in the soul's relationship to God, his love for God and his desire to see God face to face. Because the contemplative has penetrated deep into the heart of God's love he is in a better position than other more objective authors, however good and devout, to convey something of <sup>his</sup> ~~their~~ experience of God's love. What the mystic has experienced rarely, briefly and incompletely on earth is a foretaste of heaven. It is usually described in highly wrought, poetical language which also helps to stimulate the reader's imagination and inspire in him longing for heaven. Richard Rolle, one of the greatest of the English mystics, sums up the way in which love of heavenly things can wean a soul from all earthly cares and affections:

Als sone als þi hert es towched with þe swetnes of heven, þe wil lytel lyst þe myrth of þis worlde; and when þou feles joy in Criste lufe, þe wil lathe with þe joy and þe comforth of þis worlde and erthly gamen. For al melody and al riches and dēlites, þat al men in þis world kan ordayne or thynk, sownes bot noy and anger til a mans hert þat verraly es byrn<sup>e</sup> and in þe lufe of God; for he hase myrth and joy and melody in aungels sang, als þou may wele wyt. If þou leve al thyng þat þi fleschly lufe



list, for þe lufe of God, and haue na thocht on  
 syb frendes, bot forsake al for Goddes lufe, and  
 anely gyf þi hert to ~~covey~~te Goddes lufe and pay  
 hym, mare joy sal þou haue and fynd in hym þan I  
 can on thynk. 720

### CONCLUSION

Traditional Catholic devotional literature shows a remarkable continuity in its survival and circulation in England from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and, making the transition from manuscripts to printed books, on into the second quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The continuity of this tradition has been noted by a number of historians,<sup>2</sup> but its character, extent and vitality during the 1520s and 1530s have not been studied in any detail.<sup>3</sup> The tradition lived on in the manner of life exemplified by individuals such as the Lady Margaret Beaufort, St. John Fisher and Sir Thomas More - ascetic, world-denying and pious - and in the lives of certain religious communities, notably the Carthusians and Syon Abbey, which was probably the most influential centre of traditional devotion in England during the 1520s and 1530s. The tradition continued to be added <sup>to until</sup> ~~up to~~ the mid 1530s, with the publication of new works by the Syon brethren <sup>Boide</sup> ~~Bode~~, Fewterer and Whitford, and by the appearance in print, apparently for the first time, of older works such as The tre & .xii. frutes of the hooly goost or An inuocacyon glorious Named ye psalter of Iesu. Yet with few exceptions (Whitford's works, A Kempis' Imitatio Christi and some reprinted by Skot being the most notable)<sup>4</sup> no <sup>medieval</sup> traditional/works were reprinted after 1535 until the publications of the English Recusants began to appear during the 1570s.<sup>5</sup> The reason for this sudden demise seems to lie both in external circumstances and in internal weaknesses.

The most obvious of the external circumstances were the changes brought about by England's separation from Rome and by the King's claim to be "the only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England". The deaths of More, Fisher and the London Carthusians in 1535 caused widespread fear and uncertainty among the faithful.<sup>6</sup> Their fear cannot have been

allayed by the ~~the~~ dissolution of the lesser houses, the Lutheran tendencies of the Ten Articles, and the condemnation of many traditional customs as superstitious and idolatrous in the First Royal Injunctions of 1536. The government, however, although it encouraged the translation and publication of works sympathetic to moderate reform, does not seem to have ~~acted~~ <sup>acted</sup> directly to curtail the publication of traditional devotional literature. It seems to have died naturally. A more immediate threat to the continuance of the tradition was the death of Wynkyn de Worde in 1535, which severed the last direct link with the fifteenth-century English printers - Pynson had died in 1530. More than any other single person de Worde was responsible for reprinting the medieval devotional treatises which survived into the 1530s.<sup>7</sup> Amid the uncertainties and changing tastes of the second half of the decade it is not surprising <sup>is</sup> that no other printer followed him.

The internal weaknesses will be clearer if the traditional literature <sup>is</sup> divided into three, extensively overlapping, categories (the humanist contribution and the character of early Protestant treatises will be discussed separately): treatises specifically intended for conventual religious and contemplatives and others, which suggests a monastic background; manuals such as the ars moriendi books or treatises on the method and content of confession, which usually included a considerable amount of catechetical material and general works on such topics as the vices and virtues, tribulation or death; devotional writing, which varied from the formal content of the Horae, to narrative lives of Christ and the saints: many were of mixed contents,

with instruction, narrative, prayers and meditations occurring together, but there were a substantial number that may be described as works of pure devotion, and devotion generally tended to focus on the life and Passion of Christ.

Treatises for religious varied from the substantial and demanding Pilgrimage of perfeccyon and Pype or Tonne of the lyfe of perfeccyon, both written in the sixteenth century, to briefer and more simple treatises such as the Dyetary of Ghostly Helthe and The tre &.xii. frutes of the holy goost - all four works seem to have Syon connections.<sup>8</sup> Whitford's Pype or Tonne is the only one devoted exclusively to monastic topics, a refutation of Luther's attack on monasticism and a fairly technical exposition of the three vows; the others contained a good deal of general teaching on vices and virtues, temptation, private devotion and even table manners. For the most part the pattern of the monastic day and the fact of the three vows are assumed, although several discuss the difficulties of concentration during choir offices and at mass, but they are hardly to be distinguished from more general treatises such as The myrroure of the chyrche or The golden epistle. The monastic treatise was marked more by certain attitudes than by its actual content, and these attitudes are in turn reflected in a much wider range of literature than that of specifically monastic application or origins. It was the widespread acceptance of the medieval view, stated as late as the 1530s, that "ye religion of Christe...is better & more perfectly & precisely kepte in religion monastical: than in any of the other states",<sup>9</sup> which gave the monastic standard of perfection an influence out of all proportion to the actual number of religious treatises. Whitford sees obedience as the most important of the

monastic virtues,<sup>10</sup> and while not every author would accept this, the principle of submission to ecclesiastical authority and assent to the teachings of Holy Church was applied to all Christians. Belief was to be unquestioning; it was usually untaught and unreasoned beyond the ability to recite the creed, Pater, Ave and perhaps some lists of sins or the commandments, impersonal and lacking in conviction. The exercise of private judgement in matters of belief was not encouraged, and inevitably it was also weakened in regard to moral decisions, forcing the individual to rely heavily on external regulations. Thus the attitude of obedience not only helped to maintain the authority of the Church and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but it tended to lead the individual to an abdication of personal responsibility and a mechanical trust in the external forms of religion. Another attitude which received support from the monastic standard of perfection was the world-denying strain so common in medieval literature. The religious was vowed to chastity, and called upon to renounce the world and be physically separated from it. Chastity, which was usually interpreted in a sexual sense,<sup>11</sup> was a widely praised virtue, and the married state was generally considered as a necessary evil,<sup>12</sup> much inferior to celibacy. Both the flesh and the world were regarded as unequivocally evil. The bestiality of man was the subject of the "vile body" genre, while the world and all secular interests and ambitions were condemned in the contemptus mundi literature. Such attitudes did nothing to encourage a sense of human dignity nor to reconcile man to the world, and they effectively prevented the married layman following a secular occupation from aspiring to the life of perfection. The monastic rejection of the world, while it undoubtedly encouraged single-minded devotion to God, tended to overlook social concerns. Alms were given, not according to human need and desert, but



indiscriminately, since the merit accrued to the giver. The medieval treatises give little attention to social responsibilities beyond the formal listing of the works of mercy.

Works for contemplatives avoid many of the weaknesses of the monastic treatise. Because they are addressed to an individual rather than to a class of readers, they are more personal in their approach and more readily adapted to the needs of the individual. They are less insistent on the need for rigid conformity to external rules, although the printed treatises contain a considerable amount of general instruction on vices, virtues, tribulation, temptation and even external behaviour, and so they are more flexible in their advice and leave more to the discretion of the individual. While obedience to the teachings of the Church is firmly insisted on, this does not preclude the exercise of personal judgement in, for example, the use of time, choice of occupation or content of private devotion. It is for the individual - often with the aid of a spiritual director - to guide the course of his own spiritual development. This involves far more than the acceptance of an externally imposed rule of life; nor is the individual to be carried away by his feelings; they must be treated warily. Spiritual growth is based on deep knowledge - the knowledge of experience rather than intellect - of self and God. Inward disposition is therefore more important than actual performance, and meekness generally replaces obedience as the dominant virtue in contemplative treatises. The service of God cannot be reduced to a rule, but is a relationship. The contemplative treatises require not merely submission but total dedication and a strong desire of the soul to God, which they seek to strengthen. Yet they consistently avoid emotional or ascetic extremes, and encourage a common-sense attitude of moderation towards physical and practical matters. They are distinguished from the monastic and hand-book type of literature

by the flexibility and inwardness of their approach, and from many treatises of pure devotion by the moderation of their emotion. More than any other type of traditional literature the contemplative treatises present a balanced and refined view of the Christian life.

The rigidity, impersonality and externalism of much medieval teaching is to be seen particularly in the numerous forms of confession and accompanying catechetical instruction available in print during the 1520s and 1530s. Most of the confessions are comprehensive and very detailed, but entirely lacking in any sense of proportion. Both confessions and the instruction usually adhere to traditional categories, frequently no more than numbered lists of sins and virtues. But while many would be able to list the seven deadly sins, not everyone would be able to recognize them in himself and still fewer would understand their cause or know how to remedy them. The necessity of penance was taught, and authors usually explained that it meant sorrow for sins, but no further attempt was made to help the reader understand the meaning of penance. There was a lack of meaningful explanation which would help the reader relate the teaching to his own experience. Perhaps nowhere is the general absence of adequate doctrinal teaching in the traditional literature more obvious than in these confessional - catechetical handbooks. Some contemplative authors, like Hilton, and early sixteenth-century writers, such as Erasmus and William Bonde, recognized the dangers of rigid adherence to the prescribed forms for the sensitive soul and condemned the mechanical superficiality of such methods for others. Although they reflect many monastic attitudes - condemnation of fleshly and sexual sins, and of worldly interests or pleasures, and

insistence on submissive obedience to the requirements of the Church - these handbooks do not address a particular class of audience. Every Christian was a sinner, bound to make his confession at least once a year, and so the confessional-catechetical literature is neutral with regard to its audience. So too are the tribulation treatises, for spiritual and physical affliction was the lot of every man in this life, although some treatises that dealt with spiritual tribulation and temptation were clearly intended for enclosed religious.<sup>13</sup>

The usual solution to the problem of suffering was a fairly mechanical application of the works and merits principle: the amount of suffering patiently endured in this life would receive a commensurate reward in heaven. The same kind of principle was applied to the whole of life, for a good life would be rewarded. Death, the common fate of every man, was regarded as, in many ways, the crisis of life, for a good death could do much to redeem a mis-spent life. As a devotional book supplying edifying thoughts for meditation to the living the ars moriendi was again neutral with regard to audience, but as a practical conduct book it seems more relevant to lay people. Although it usually followed a formal structure it seems far less rigid and impersonal than most medieval handbooks. Faced with the final temptation of the Devil, and threatened by the pains of death and of hell, recitation of the articles of belief seems less mechanical than it does in a catechetical context, and turning away from the world and the flesh to concentrate on the life to come is entirely appropriate for a dying man. The fear of death, judgement and the pains of hell produced by ars moriendi books and other treatises on the Four Last Things may have frightened some

souls to amend their life before their last hours; certainly medieval religion had a substantial strain of threatening pain and torment. But the ars moriendi books also held out the hope of a heavenly reward to the soul that remained faithful to the end, and they did not omit the more personal comfort of Christ crucified and the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin to encourage the dying man. Similarly, the gloom and fear of the Last Things were lightened by descriptions of the joyous state of the blessed in heaven. The Last Things were made to seem intensely and physically real. The strong other-worldly strain and eschatological dimension that pervade so much medieval devotional literature did mean that this life was regarded in the perspective of eternity; it was important not for itself but as the preparation of the world to come.

Like the confessional and ars moriendi manuals, devotional books were not addressed to any specific audience. Many of the works described as devotional in fact were of mixed contents and, like the Speculum Vitae Christi, included instruction on moral and practical as well as spiritual matters. Some, such as those intended to prepare the reader for mass or to occupy him through the liturgy, were as practical as any other manual, but they probably contained more prayers and meditations. Although they sometimes provided explanations of the prayers and actions of the liturgy, they also stressed the importance of correct behaviour. But even devotional books on the mass or on the Last Judgement focused, like nearly all the traditional literary devotion that has survived in print, on the life and Passion of Christ. The most common type of devotion is what may be described as the practice of the devotional present, in which the reader imagines himself actually

present at the scene described and reacts accordingly. Thus a great deal of devotional writing is descriptive; it strives after realism and tends to be very detailed and physical. It gives detailed descriptions of what is done and tells precisely how it is done - for instance nailing Christ to the cross, setting it up, and the desposition. Attention is paid to the quality of things, for instance the coldness of the marble pillar to which Christ is bound or the keen wind as He is crucified; the delicacy and beauty of His body; the pain resulting from the silk robe sticking to His open wounds and being pulled off; or the aggravated cruelty of the blunt nails and the stretching of His limbs on the cross. The reader is meant so to see - aided, of course, by the iconographic representation of these scenes in books and church decorations - and feel what Christ endured that he will experience compassion for Christ. But outside the contemplative treatises there was no suggestion as to how the sympathy might deepen into love or awaken a practical response in the reader. There was no effective control over the emotional response encouraged, and the excessive emotionalism of Margery Kempe was probably not unusual. But the realism of such descriptive writing enabled many to feel that they knew Jesus well, and if their understanding of Him was limited the personal bond was strong, so strong and real that many claimed to have seen or spoken to Him or His Mother, whose grief was as real to them as the pain of Her Son and whose iconographical representation as familiar. There was undoubtedly far more popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin than is suggested by the extant literary treatises,<sup>14</sup> where her position is clearly subordinate to Her Son and references to her are less common



than might have been expected. The exclusive emphasis on Christ's Passion meant that the events of the Resurrection and Ascension were comparatively neglected, and the on-going redemptive work of Christ, His power and His mercy, were not given sufficient emphasis. Thus the Person of Jesus was regarded as historical rather than divine, and the devotions to His blood and wounds associated with the Passion were even further separated from doctrine or theology. Theology was generally presented in list or diagram<sup>ma</sup>tic form - as with the Trinity - or through some symbolic narrative such as the Four Daughters of God and the heavenly counsel. Miracles rather than rational explanation were used to prove the truth of the traditional Catholic doctrines of the mass. Cut off from the controls of reason or theology it is not surprising that popular devotion often tended to be over-emotional, or to stray into superstitious and magical usage.

Some of the particular weaknesses of the Catholic devotional literature which survived into the 1530s are suggested by the above summary. More generally medieval religion had become fragmented. One is conscious of a gulf between conventual religious and lay people, between those who knew Latin and could read the Bible, engage in theological debate and follow the liturgy, and the illiterate or those who were limited to the vernacular, who were kept in comparative ignorance. There is a lack of connection between emotion and intellect; between external regulations and inward understanding; and the divorce between belief and practice led to the widespread problem of hypocrisy. Also, despite the fact that many treatises were of mixed contents, there was a tendency for some types of teaching, notably catechetical instruction on the articles of faith, the commandments and sacraments, to <sup>again</sup> be isolated from more general moral teaching or devotions. Lack of

theological content exaggerated the value of the emotions in religion, and such emotionalism could lead to fantasies and visions difficult to distinguish from ~~the~~<sup>true</sup> visions, dangerous to the ignorant and open to exploitation by the unscrupulous.<sup>15</sup> Widespread ignorance also tended to encourage credulous beliefs and superstitious practices. The character of late medieval devotion seems to owe much to the Church's need to control popular religion at a time when the vast majority of people were uneducated and illiterate. Simple rules and numbered lists that could be learnt by heart and a form of devotion which depended on the feelings and imagination rather than intellectual comprehension were well suited to such people. But as vernacular literacy increased, and courts and businesses became more sophisticated, the Church failed to adapt to the changing intellectual and social circumstances.

But although in retrospect the weaknesses are more obvious, the Catholic tradition had considerable strengths, which must have made it seem impregnable to the faithful. There was the unbroken tradition of the Church, stretching back over the centuries to the Apostles and Christ Himself. There was the geographical extent of the Church, and the general unity of her belief. The literary treatises, in contrast to much popular and non-literary devotion, were doctrinally sound; they do not, for instance, exaggerate the powers of the Blessed Virgin, nor do they suggest an unhealthy morbidity or preoccupation with death. Moderation and common sense characterize their ascetic, moral and devotional teaching. Because it seems to have been generally accepted, even though it could not be followed in its entirety by everybody, the monastic standard of perfection was not a divisive influence. The Church drew all Christians (religious, priests and laypeople, learned

and unlearned) together in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, penance, the mass and the Last Rites, and in the celebration of the Church's feasts, and prepared every one to withstand temporal tribulation and to face death. The gulf between this world and the next was to some extent bridged by the belief that those on earth could help the souls in purgatory by their prayers and offerings. Also the physical realism of the descriptive writing that made Jesus a real person, made the Judgement, purgatory, hell and heaven - all frequently depicted in art - as definite and real as anything on earth.<sup>16</sup> This materialistic interpretation of religion had many strengths, for instance it probably made belief easy, especially to the unlearned, but it did tend to overshadow the spiritual dimension of faith. However, the importance of descriptive writing and the desire to stimulate the reader's feelings encouraged the use of a wide variety of literary forms to express religious truths. They varied from lyrics and drama to prose narratives, catechetical lists, prayers and meditations. Longer works relied not on rational argument or thematic development for their structure, but on a loose grouping of topics or else numbered divisions, which could become quite elaborate in some devotions. The language was sufficiently flexible to switch easily from instruction to meditation or narrative description in the course of a treatise. It was also rich enough to convey a wide range of experience from the mystics' "rich nought" to the brutal activities of Christ's persecutors; where appropriate it could be highly elaborate, making use of alliteration and techniques of repetition, or it could be utterly simple, and in mood it could range from the hauntingly beautiful and moving to the highly dramatic or harrowing. Catechetical lists apart, it was rarely dull, although it could be cumbrous. This

literary vitality is matched by the vitality of the religious arts in the early decades of the sixteenth century. During this period many churches were rebuilt or extended, and people seemed eager to raise money to refurnish them or to buy new carvings, screens, statues or glass.<sup>17</sup>

While the Catholic tradition certainly did not lack vitality, many recognized that there was widespread corruption and ignorance within the Church. Some kind of reform was needed. The austerity, purity and vitality of the Carthusians, Observants and <sup>the</sup> Bridgettines at Syon suggested a standard of monastic reform,<sup>18</sup> and it is notable that the brethren from these three houses suffered death in their defence of the traditional faith. Syon's influence on devotional literature was considerable. Bonde's Pilgrimage, Fewterer's Myrrour or Glasse of Christes Passion and Whitford's Pype or Tonne were all substantial works, written in English for a literate audience, with a more substantial intellectual-doctrinal content presented in a more systematic manner, than earlier vernacular treatises. Whitford was one of the first vernacular writers to attempt to adapt the traditional monastic-based devotion to the needs of laymen. He was probably influenced more by his contacts with secular households and by the ideals of the Christian humanists in this venture than by his monastic background. Erasmus was the figure-head of the Christian humanist movement. He sought to strip away the doctrinal, ceremonial and institutional accretions of later ages and enable the Church to rediscover her primitive purity of faith and doctrine, which he had found in the study of Scripture and the early Greek and Latin Fathers. Echoing Plato rather than contemplative

authors he re-asserted the inwardness of religion, the importance of understanding and good intentions against external conformity. The main instruments of his reform were to be learning and education. The classical languages and literature were to be the basis of this education, the manner of life recommended owed more to Stoic philosophy than to the traditional monastic virtues, and the end-product was a civilized, humane and reasonable man, dedicated to the pursuit of truth and willing to bear rule. The monastic virtues of chastity, obedience and humility are displaced by the classical virtues of justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude, and far more emphasis is placed on social duties and responsibilities and on human relationships, for example between married couples, between parents and children, or between friends. In contrast to the traditional view, the world was regarded as morally neutral rather than as unequivocally evil. Man was seen as a noble creature, made in God's image and capable of achieving perfection, rather than as the bestial, unclean, sinful wretch of the "vile body" genre.

Admiration for the pagan virtues led the humanists to believe, optimistically, that by education and natural reason man could go far towards truth and perfection. Man was set free from the restraints of repressive obedience; the authority of the Church was less dominant, and far more weight was given to knowledge and the individual's exercise of private judgement. The basis of the humanists' concept of life and truth was secular: Christianity was an extension, the ultimate perfection, of all life and truth, but not fundamentally necessary. Faith was regarded as a matter of rational judgement and dedication to the pursuit of truth, the philosophia Christi; it had little to do with salvation. Probably as a reaction against the emotionalism and over-emphasis on the human Jesus characteristic of medieval devotion, the humanists saw Him as an ideal, a teacher and exemplar of a manner of life, rather than as the Son



of Man. But if their faith was rather impersonal and tended to discriminate in favour of the intellectual and socially influential, it was nevertheless a valuable corrective to the anti-intellectualism, pessimism and unworldliness of much medieval religion. The form of their treatises reflects their classical models: there is usually a sense of structure and proportion, they make use of a rational argument, they are not afraid to use satire or to allow the occasional trace of humour to appear, and they reflect their author's lively human interest in personal circumstances and surroundings.

The humanists opened up Christianity to the world and to the intellect, but Erasmus also wanted to purify the Church. Education alone was not sufficient. To achieve reform every Christian needed free access to and knowledge of the source-book of the Philosophia Christi, The Bible, in the vernacular. This demand, together with a number of other humanist ideas, was taken up in a far more militant spirit by the English Reformers. Unlike Erasmus, who refused to condemn outright the customs and institutions he criticized, they sought to abolish all the ceremonies, doctrines and institutions which they found to be superstitious or lacking in biblical authority. The Bible, interpreted literally, was to be the sole standard of Christian life and doctrine. Those who deviated from this standard - or from the Reformers' interpretation of it - or who preferred to follow what the Reformers regarded as the man-made traditions of Catholicism, put themselves beyond hope of salvation. Reformed doctrine was the hall-mark of pure faith and was necessary to salvation; the Protestant treatises were characterized by their biblicism and by their almost exclusive interest in and concern for doctrinal teaching; a few collections of prayers were the only specifically devotional works. They assumed

that true faith depended on knowledge, and they perhaps reflected the humanists' optimistic belief in education, in suggesting that men would be converted if they knew the true doctrine of Christ--the difference between the Gospels and the Law, and between justification by faith alone and salvation by works -- but they were careful to emphasize that faith must be proved by works. A good life was the proof of faith, but the Protestants made little attempt to formulate a practical rule of life or to define precise standards of morality or behaviour. In their treatises doctrinal teaching invariably overshadows practical advice and personal experience. Faith was, in theory at least, grounded on personal decision, or experience of conversion: the individual became convinced of the saving power of the Risen Christ -- for it was to the victory of Christ's Resurrection rather than to the pathos of His Passion that the earliest Reformers appealed. Yet the dynamic, joyous, confident, personal faith implied by the witness of individual Reformers and by their theology does not always find expression in their treatises. These tend to be dull, impersonal, heavily didactic rather than inspiring, and often contentious. Their language is largely biblical or else rather prosaic, unless they are indulging in polemic, when it can be more energetic. They do, however, tend to dispose their material in a more systematic way than most medieval vernacular treatises. But in its reaction against the abuses of the Catholic tradition the reformation swung too far in the opposite direction, and banished beauty, imagination, the arts and emotion from religion. The medieval over-emphasis on the life and Passion of Jesus was corrected by a more balanced theological view of Christ, but at the expense of the strong personal relationship between Jesus and the believer; and the Reformers

reacted to the earlier concentration on the New Testament by dwelling on the Old Testament history and legislation: their lengthy, edifying prayers are nearly all drawn from the Old Testament. The Protestant treatises appealed to their reader's heads, not to their hearts.

Only in a few biblical paraphrases, such as Savonarola's, or the prayers of Tave<sup>n</sup>er's Epitome of the Psalmes, is there any sense of real feeling in reformed treatises, other than campaigning zeal for a cause. The Reformed authors assumed a literate audience, able to read the Bible for themselves - there was little to appeal to the illiterate in such a faith. They placed before the individual, in a way quite foreign to the vernacular authors of the Catholic tradition, the tools of his salvation - the Bible and reformed doctrine. It was then largely up to the individual to extend his knowledge and faith - the Protestants, like the humanists, allowed the individual considerable freedom and encouraged the exercise of private judgement in the practice of their faith. Again in common with the humanists, the Protestants placed much more emphasis on the individual's social obligations than did most medieval authors. In English Protestantism there was a hint of nationalism in the praise given to the King as leader of the reformation, obedience to the secular power was insisted upon, and the use made of Lollard literature to support the Reformers' claims for vernacular Scriptures and the abolition of Roman superstitions and Papal powers helped to suggest that the reformation was a native English growth, and neither a new nor a foreign invention. The Protestant, like his Catholic counterpart, was expected to give alms, but responsibility, to the honest and hardworking and to neighbours who were in need - the contrast between the almsgiving of George and Cornelius in Erasmus' Fu~~n~~nus is instructive. He was also required by his manner

of life and, if he had suitable knowledge and gifts, by preaching and teaching to make known the Word of God and the reformed faith. The Church was no longer regarded by Protestants as the final arbiter of life and doctrine, nor was it seen as a material and hierarchical structure, but as the Body of Christ, made up of all true Christians. The ideal member of that Body was no longer the conventual religious or contemplative, nor was he necessarily in holy orders, nor was he the intellectual humanist, but the hard-working, literate, married householder. Protestant teaching and devotion must have appealed particularly to this rapidly expanding but previously much neglected section of the community.

The reformation of English private devotion was sudden and decisive. Until 1535 the Catholic tradition was dominant, and its flourishing condition is confirmed by the works appearing in print for the first time and by the publication of new works. The writings of the Syon brethren and the treatises of the Christian humanists suggest that the Church was slowly beginning to recognize the needs of lay people, and attempting to provide the public with a more intellectually satisfying faith. The writings of a mid-century parish priest such as Robert Parkyn and the works of the English Recusants prove that, although exiled by Protestant rulers, the traditional forms and topics of devotion did not die. But, like all private devotion, it relied heavily on a framework of doctrine, liturgy, ceremonial and custom; and the tradition was weakened by the Protestants' destruction of its intellectual, spiritual and physical setting. The Catholic Church in England seems to have been remarkably unprepared for the upheavals of the 1530s. She seems to have felt that by the appointment of Sir Thomas More as official apologist,

and with the assistance of the Crown, the new Lutheran threat could be contained, as the Lollards had been. But, bereft of the Crown's active support through Henry's break with Rome, and by the ascendancy<sup>n</sup> of Thomas Cromwell, she was vulnerable to attack. She had neither a well thought-out literary defence, nor a popular leader of sufficient authority to rally clergy and people - the successful prelates were statesmen or intellectuals unsuited to popular leadership. The Protestants, on the other hand, were on the defensive from the beginning, and they made effective use of press and pulpit, both to attack the acknowledged weaknesses and abuses of the Catholic Church, and to preach a new, coherent presentation of the Christian faith with energy and conviction. Away from London, particularly in the poorer rural areas, popular support for the traditional faith and customs lived on, as witnessed by some of the demands made in the course of the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace, and more emphatically in the Western Rebellion,<sup>19</sup> and by the preservation of church plate, vestments and furnishings among pious individuals. But traditional English Catholicism, the unselfconscious and natural faith of England, could not survive either Protestant opposition or the doctrinaire, continental Catholicism of Mary's reign without critical self-scrutiny and redefinition, which, together with the effects of Trent, meant that the Catholicism of Mary's reign and of the Elizabethan Recusants differed in many respects from the traditional faith of England before 1530.